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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD REARING PRACTICES AMONG URBAN LOW INCOME FAMILIES.

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BASED ON THE RESEARCH OF A PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER, THIS PAPER DESCRIBES THE CHILD REARING PRACTICES OF SOME LOW INCOME FAMILIES IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IT WAS FOUND THAT IN GENERAL BASIC PRIORITIES IN THE FAMILY WERE GIVEN TO FOOD, CLOTHING, AND RENT, AND THESE PRIORITIES AFFECTED THE MOTHER'S PERCEPTION OF HER CHILD'S NEEDS. THE MOTHERS SAW THEMSELVES AS DOING MORE FOR THEIR CHILDREN THAN HAD BEEN DONE FOR THEM. MORE SPECIFICALLY, A NUMBER OF PARENTS EXPRESSED THE NEED FOR "SETTING AN EXAMPLE" FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR. PHYSICAL CARE, TEACHING HER CHILDREN PROPER BEHAVIOR, AND THE ABILITY TO DO HOUSEHOLD WORK WERE FELT TO BE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MOTHER. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD FATHER AND HUSBAND INCLUDED HAVING A JOB, TAKING CARE OF HIS FAMILY, AND HELPING CARE FOR THE CHILDREN. MANY PARENTS EXPRESSED THE NEED TO CONTROL THE WHEREABOUTS AND ASSOCIATES OF THEIR CHILDREN TO PROTECT THEM FROM EXTRA-FAMILY INFLUENCES. THREE OUT OF FOUR MOTHERS SAID THAT PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT WAS AN ACCEPTED PRACTICE. CONTRARY TO OTHER REPORTS, THIS OBSERVER FOUND THAT MOTHERS IN ONE-PARENT FAMILIES WOULD PREFER TO BE MARRIED. (JL)

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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD REARING PRACTICES AMONG URBAN LOW INCOME FAMILIES[1]

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As the date of this meeting drew nearer, I began to realize that you were going to be a somewhat different group than you wre in April, had I been able to attend that meeting. In the intervening months you have had eight to ten sessions with low income parent groups and have undoubtely added to your knowledge and skill in working with these groups. This gave me pause. I thought it best to stop and try to define the nature of our exchange this morning since something different might be called for in light of your field experience.

I am certain that you have discovered at first hand the simple but important truth that a look at the different groups and types represented among the poor shows that poverty, in its roots, is not a monolithis phenomenon that will yield to a single specific remedy either among the total poor or among minority group poor.

I am equally certain that we share the same sentiments about complex human behavior expressed by Oliver La Fargo in his foreword to Oscar Lewis' Five Families:

> The longer we study human beings in their infinite variety, the more apparent it becomes that they cannot in reality be encompassed within the specific rigidities of the kind of data that can be manipulated mathematically, even given the staggering range of present day computers. Somewhere along the line there must be an interpretation arising from the indicidual's observations, with all its weaknesses of emotion and bias.

Bearing in mind this diversity and this complexity, I would like to move on to some consideration that we in the Child Rearing Study felt are essential to an understanding of low income families. But first a word about the Child Rearing Study

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[1]Prepared for the Regional Training Institute, Project Enable, Miami, Florida July 11, 1966.

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about which you have already heard. It might be useful for me to recall that the Study's focus was on the socio-economic and community factors that affect the daily lives and child rearing practices of low income families. You may remember that we collected our data through intensive interviewing and field observation in various low income neighborhoods. I participated in the intensive interviewing and, in addition, lived for fifteen months in a public housing project as just another tenant. There my basic task was to gain acceptance and to participate in the on-going life of the project so that I might observe, experience, and interpret some of the family and community influences on child rearing. We wanted to know how people lived, what they thought, what they hoped for, and how they saw themselves.

Contrary to the popular myths about the inarticulateness of the poor, we found, throughout our study, ready and sometimes eloquent response to our desire to learn from them. In fact, I sometimes wonder if we may not need to first see ourselves in a learning role before we can affectively assume a teaching or helping role.

In my discussion today I would like to focus on several areas that I think may be of particular significance to you in your work. First I would like to talk about some of the choices and priorities low income families have to make and set because of an inadequate money supply. Next I would like to indicate some of the ways low income mothers evaluate themselves and their child rearing performance. Following this I want to talk about some of the specifics of their child rearing behavior. Then I would like to give some attention to first that old friend, the one parent family, and then to that most neglected of all persons, the low income Negro male.

One of the things that I think we would all agree on is that the poor cannot take for granted is being unable to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. As simple as this may sound, I sometimes feel that we are not quite aware

of what this really means in day-to-day living. Living among the families in the housing project, I soon learned that the cash that could be counted on was severely limited and I saw at first hand some of the bitter consequences of this fact. These families had to count every penny; their money was earmarked and overclaimed before they got it. They had more things that needed to be done, and that they wished to do for the family and home, than they had money to do them with. Harsh choices had to be made and lived with constantly among efforts to satisfy basic needs and unfrivolous wants. There was always more than one claim on each dollar of a very meager supply.

As I learned more and more about some of these families, the logic and rationality of most of their chioces and much of their behavior became clearer. Moreover, from my inside vantage point, most of their choices appeared neither irresponsible nor callous.

Among low income families basic priority has to be given to the appeasement of hunger, keeping clothes on one's back, shoes on one's feet, and a roof over one's head. Living in the project I learned the real meaning of hunger- - hunger as seen in children's faces, heard in their unsatisfied request for more, and distinguishable in the quiet anguish and despair of a parent helped with groceries during a money crisis when no agency came forth with aid.

I found that some parents gave first priority to food. For example, one mother of four, who was separated from her husband, had to make a choice when the court ordered support payments did not come through regularly. She chose to negelect her rent and buy food, and when she wound up with a dispossess notice, I could understand why; there was no way for her to have done both. Others, like one mother whose jusband was in the armed forces overseas, gave rent priority She was determined to keep her family of five intact until her husband's return. Since her rent

took a big bite out of her monthly allotment, food was in shorter and shorter supply as the month dragged on. "One day we eat like kings," she said, "and the next day we have nothing." Occasionally she made an extra dollar doing someone's hair. Once when I turned over to her a dollar someone had left with me for her, she carefully examined the bill and commented ruefully, "I haven't seen money for so long this dollar looks like it shrunk!"

A third mother who had only two children and whose husband drew a weekly paycheck of $ 75.00 was better able to turn her attention to clothing for her children. Not only were they about the best dressed children in the project, they compared favorably with middle class children in their dress, if not surpassing them. Over and over I was impressed with the fact that if little children were running around the house without panties, or if newspaper was used for toilet paper, or if children were kept home from school because they had nothing to wear, these choices were not an expression of cultural preference but a result of the particular economic bind the families were caught in.

Even though mothers had to make such choices and establish such priorities, this did not prevent some of them from placing a high valuation on their child rearing performances. In this respect I had much to learn. In fact, I have to confess that I had to relearn a baluable lesson I had learned years ago in a different context--working with the blind. It concerns seeing people as they see themselves.

I brought to the housing project all of my own, somewhat conventionsl notions about the behavior and important characteristics of the "good mother," and the inclination to feel that certain lacks, or some ill-defined combination of lacks, identified the "bad mother." I soon found it necessary to reassess some of my thinking and, in time, my perspective began to change.

Gradually I learned that the way I regarded the child rearing performances of

some of the mothers was quite different from the way they regarded themselves. Years earlier I had had to learn thet the way sighted people regard the blind is often not the way the blind regard themselves; they see themselves as more capable than we do, and thus with many mothers who are poor.

I think I began puzzling over this because of my surprise at finding myself liking so well mothers whose child rearing behavior I did condone. As I tried to sort out my own feelings I bagan to realize that I had learned enought about these mothers to understand their behavior and to get caught up in their own estimation of themselves. The essence of this self-evaluation often had something to do with the fact that they tended to think that in some way they had made, or were about to make, an advance over their own childhood situation and the child rearing behavior of their parents. And, in truth, they often had.

It became increassingly evident thet the childhood experience of some of the young mothers at the housing project had left a strong, often indelible sense of shame and indignation over their having to live without many needed material and non-material things in life. Their effort to provide something different for their children, whether it was more food, more clothes or more affection had a much greater significance than I had at first surmised. It stemmed from an insistent, even though unfocussed, thrust to do better and more for their children than had been done for themselves.

As I learned to look at these mothers, not in terms of my expectation, but in terms of where they saw themselves on the child rearing ladder, I found that I was able to break away from the common tendency to overstress and over-generalize negative traits. I developed an orientation and understanding that was rooted in their priorities, and in their economic resources and options, rather than mine. I was better able to understand why some mothers seemed to concentrate on physical needs rather than psychological needs, and I could appreciate the wisdom and low key of optimism of one young mother who, in trying to reconcile herself to

the slow pace of getting ahead said, "After all, you have to crawl before you can walk."

I think that we sometimes need to be remined that the mere fact that a child can go to school every day may be considered a major achievement by some mothers. How the children are able to perform when they get there and how teachers and other students looked on them are other matters. A mother of twelve, who had grown up in the rural South and who had followed her husband to the city in his search for work, poignantly described the improvement in her situation even though she was now receiving public assistance:

> I ain't been used to too much in my life. I always lived hard. Many a morning I went to school without a bite but I knew my mother was doing the best she could ...I used to go to school in the winter half-barefoot and mu chilluns don't know nothing about that...I think my children are twenty times better off. They've been blessed in so many ways. They can go to school; they don't have to stay out nary a day. They can study, they can go to church. People ought to count their blessings. I counts mines every day. I look back over what I haven't had and what I got now...if you see where you can pay for your groceries, pay rent, buy a piece or two --you're blessed.

Not only do some of the mothers set their child rearing goals on the basis of situational factors in their childhood, they also are guided by the child rearing behavior of their parents. Sometimes their parents are used as negative models, sometimes positive, and sometimes a blend of both. We kept getting this picture of continuity and change in the responses parents gave to our question of whether they were bringing up their children the same way they were brought up. We found that it was in large measure their own life experience that dictated their direction and goals--and not Dr. Spock. For some mothers this had its limitations because, even though they wanted to be different or do differently, they did not have the needed know-how nor the necessary economic supports. As a result they would sometimes be drawn into kinds of behavior of which they themselves did not approve.

The more I was confronted with this reaching into the past for child rearing

models, the more certain thoughts began to shape in my mind. As I examined responses of three generations of motherhood to questions concerning the way they were bringing up their children, I was impressed with the fact that what I was seeing was not the "culture of poverty" , not class, but some of the historical strands of child rearing concerns and practices in this country. Let me illustrate.

Robert Sunley in an article in Childhood in Contemporary Cultures[2] cites three schools of thought in the American child rearing literature of 1820-1860. Most dominant was Calvinist theory:

> The keystone of Calvinist doctrine regarding child rearing was...the belief that the infant was 'totally depraved' and doomed to depravity throughout life unless given careful and strict guidance by the parents and, ultimately saved through grace...Complete obedience and submission were thus requisite if the child was to be kept from sin and evil...Submission was obtained by 'breaking the will' of the child...'Will' was seen as any defiance of the parents' wishes at any age...In general, breaking the will or training in obedience was begun by teaching the child to obey every command quickly and completely.

I cannot help but hear echoes of this doctrine in the mother who thinks her child was "born to be bad" or in the mother who demands instant obedience and prides herself on the fact that she never has to speak to her children twice. Nor is it difficult to see a connecting link with the mother who regards almost any attempt at self-expression as "back talk" for some children still should be seen and not heard.

The second theme Sunley mentions is that of the "hardening school," stemming from Rousseau: Its implication was that "it was the external environment of civilization which was dangerous to the child. Children should become strong, vigorous, unspoiled men, like those in the early days of our country."

Perhaps you may recall the grandmother in "Three Generations," who said, "If a person comes up the hard way when he is a young child, then, when he grows up, he can take more hardship than those who came up the easy way." Or take the young

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[2] Mead, Margaret and Woltenstein, M. Childhood in Contempory Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp 150-163

mother who says:

> My father and mother made it pretty clear to us that we wouldn't ever get what we wanted. I guess that's why I'm not too disappointed I don't have a lot of fancy things. I don't believe in shielding my children either. I never expected to have more than I got and I don't think my children should expect more than they've got or more then we can give them.

Also related to this same theme of hardening and austerity are some of the attitudes I encountered about not spoiling children, attitudes that seem to be counted not just to overindulgence but to most any indulgence of emotional needs. I am reminded of a twenty-year-old husband with a rural background who was critical of his wife for being demonstrative with their four-year-old son; it was just "not good for him," and of another young father who was criticized by neighbors for playing so much with his children because "if you play with children, they loose respect for you." But most of all I remember the renacity with thisch the two-year-old son of a Housing Project neighbor clung to my neck when I picked him up; I literally had to pry his hands apart when I wanted to put him down. His mother attached no significance to this other than that I was spoiling him and she had no intention of doing the same thing.

The third theme underlying child rearing historically that Sunley mentions has to do with justice, firmness and understanding in child guidance.

> The child was to be led, nor driven; persuaded to the right not command. Consistency and firmness were counselled, but with understanding and justice to the child...Encouragements and reqards should be offered; beatings, reproaches, slaps, dark closets, and shaming were to be avoided. Punishment and reqard were to be administered not according to the motives...the child (had) certain needs and potentialities which the parents were not to frustrate or control, but rather were to help fulfill and encourage into full development.

Among our families, particularly the younger ones and those with more education, we see this transition. A recurrent note is the theme of changing times as in the two instances that follow:

> My father was mean; he used to beat us a lot. I find it doesn't help...I talk to them. I don't raise them in an old-fashioned way. Times are more modern.
>
> or
>
> In some ways I think it is all right to follow parents. Then as time changes, we change with them and I think that's good for children. You can't just go the way it is handed down. You just don't do that way here in America - - like in the old country.

I might even go a step beyond the nineteenth century to our twentieth century emphasis on love and here one could sometimes catch a shift in emphasis in the young mother and in the more educated mother. When asked what she thought was the most important thing a child should have a twenty-one-year-old mother responded with "love and trust." And a college bred mother of ten, now on public assistance, said:

> ...the love of their parents is surely one of the main things in making a child happy. This is where the beginning of all things in the child's development takes place.

What I am suggesting is that the child rearing emphases and currents among low income families are many and varied and are part and parcel of the American scene. I think that as we compare the attitudes and values of low income and middle income mothers, the evidence is rather convincing thet the differences that do exist are not so much differences resulting from class and culture as they are differences resulting from a lack of means, limited education, and less sophistication. Just as parent educator objectives have shifted, according to Orville Brim, from "a concern over moral characteristics, to physical health characteristics, to a recent emphasis... upon emotional and mental health characteristics."[3] so perhaps we need to think in terms of this process and sequence as we try to decide where our parent groups are and on what basis we should intervene.

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[3] Brim, Orville G., Jr. New York: Education for Child Rearing. The Free Press. p. 91.

I would like now to touch on some specifics of child rearing that illustrate some of the things I have been talking about and that I think may be of interest to you. They concern the importance of good example, what parents see as their role, what they try to teach their children, how they discipline them, and what extra-family influences concern them.

Today there is much talk about models and the lack of models and often a tendency to assume that low income families have no awareness of the need for good models and little desire for positive and effective models. True enough, the parents I knew did not talk about models, but what kind of parents do talk such textbook talk? However, parents of all stripes do talk quite a bit about "setting an example." We heard it from parents of all ages and both sexes, and we heard it from parents who sometimes had an acute awareness of their own shortcomings.

For example, a widowed grandfather who prided himself on his efficiency as a janitor and who was still the patriarch of his family, justly summarized the way he had tried to live when he said:

> If a parent wants a child to behave, then what parent must let his own life be an example for the child.

A middle-aged domestic worker volunteered:

> Parents have to set an example for their children by the way they live. Me and my husband have done just that. It don't make no difference what color people are or who they work for; if you have principles and live by them, people know it.

An alcoholic mother who had several illegitimate children after separating from her husband still could say:

> If the mother and father carry themselves right, then the children would carry themselves right, too. Children do what they see grownups do.

The parental role of the "good father and husband was defined in terms of his having a job, taking care of his family, and helping with the children. There is

also considerable consensus about the components of the "good mother" image. In such delineations of the good mother there is a constant emphasis on physical care:

> A good mother tries to look after her children and see that they are cleaned, fed and disciplined. She always wants the best for her children and tries to teach them what they should know.

And:

> A good mother is a mother who will stay home and take care of her children...one who will try to keep her children half way decent. She will wash and cook for them and let them go to the movies and Sunday school. She will try to teach them how to behave themselves and she will show them that she is trying to be good to them.

In these statements the frequest use of the verb "try" suggests that many parents are painfully conscious of the fact that achieving these goals are not the easiest thing to do in their circumstances. You may have noted also the references to "teaching" their children. In this connection we picked up several variations on the major theme of teaching - - teaching right from wrong, teaching housework, teaching children to behave, to get along with one another, and to share. A combination of these conserns are apparent to one mother's familiar American injunction: "Children should be taught to mind adults, never to lie or steal and to do what the Bible says."

In view of the many large families we found it understandable that some mothers put as much emphasis on the need for boys to learn to cook and clean house as they put on the need for girls to learn. Observation and experience suggest that a variety of motives are involved in teaching household chores to both sexes. Sometimes it is just a matter of providing some releif to the mother in her daily work, other times it is seen as preparation for marriage and a future work role, some associate these tasks with the need to learn responsibility, and others associate them with learning the value of work. Often youngesters were pressed into service at an early age. Once when I expressed my surprise to a neighbor at the housing project on finding her three year-old and four-year-old daughters wiping up the bathroom floor. I was

promptly squelched with their mother's indignant response. "Well, theys the ones that dirties it up!"

Learning to get along with one another has particular significance in large low income families and tied in with this is an emphasis on teaching children to share. There is often an urgency about the latter that is somewhat differenct from our text-book emphasis on sharing. I had this rather sharply brought to my attention by a mother in the housing project. I had been asked to get some reactions of the mothers to a brochure that was being prepared by a parent educator, no less, to introduce plans for a new playground; in the process she included some comments on child rearing and the value of play. After reading the brochure one of the mothers disparagingly remarked that she could see that it wasn't written for them. First, all it did was talk about "your child, your child," and everybody there had more than one child. Secondly, it said that you should see that "your child" had toys of his own, but she has to teach that the toys belong to everybody because she cannot afford enough for everyone to have his own.

Discipline received a great deal of attention from our mothers and three out of four mothers favored some use of physical punishment including some whom we rated as our best mothers. There was an openness and frankness in their discussions of physical punishment that seemed to indicate less guilt about their use of physical punishment than we find in middle class mothers. They described everything from "little spankings" on "little bottoms" to "good hard whippings," "cracking heads," and "tearing up butts." And this punishment was matted out for such things as not minding, talk back, fighting with siblings, using profanity, and lying, and stealing.

While some parents thought that physical punishment made children respect them more, or helped them remember not to repeat their misbehavior, others were doubtful of its efficacy, but cited its value to themselves. One mother put it this way:

> Oh, I beats them. I don't believe it helps them but it helps me.

And another states:

> If I'm real tired and in a bad mood, I tear into them for looking at me.

Invariably parents had suggestions for alternatives to physical punishment. One out of two mothers said that they thought it helped to explain things to children- - to explain why they were wrong. Others suggested deprivation of some privilege, notably TV watching, and a few sent the children to bed, made them stand in a corner, or sit still in a chair. There was little or no mention made of the use of rewards, praise, persuasion, compromise and the withdrawal of love or attention. However, these techniques were observed in actual practice even though they were not a part of explicit child rearing theory and rationalization. Now and again one caught glimpses of the relationship between means and child rearing techniques as in the case of a mother who told a child, "I would give you a reward but I don't have anything to reward you with."

The extra-family influences that affect their children are a major concern of many parents and there is frequest reference to the need to control their children's whereabouts and associates. We found that few parents were satisfied with the neighborhood in which they lived and they tried to protect their children from the pathology of a ghetto environment. I can recall how long I pondered over the record on one mother who had beaten unmercifully her twelve-year-old daughter when she came home from work and found her daughter dressed up in her mother's clothes, and high heels, rouged, lipsticked, and bejeweled. At first I could not understand this behavior. I thought of the many times I had done the same as a child and my mother's accepting response. What was so wrong to this mother? Her behavior did not make sense to me until I happened to reread the record. This time my eye caught some words

that I must have previously sloughed over in my indignation at the beating: the mother described her daughter as being dressed up like a "you know what." Sudenly I saw what the mother had seen and what had frightened her into her desperate behavior - - the image of a prostitute!

Some exposure to, or fleeting, but recognizable contact with the narcotic, the winehead, the prevert, or the promiscuous is not uncommon in the ghetto. While a partivular person, adult or child, may not have been exposed to the full gamut of deviance or pathology, the chances are high thet there is some exposure to these deviant types. In their effort to combat these influences, some parents appear almost over-protective; others try to combat these influences through their teachings and emphasis on their own contrasting standards. Still others seem to accept the exposure to social pathology and physical deterioration resignedly, as though it were something over which they have no control, about which they can do little.

Let us now turn to my last two concerns, the one-parent family and the low income male. I suppose that one of the most talked about and written about phenomenon in low income family life is the one-parent family. In some senses it appears to have received a disproportionate share of attention and certain confusions seem to have resulted.

Earlier I referred to the meetings I had with the white middle class mothers who were being trained as psychiatric aides. I still recall the open amazement that was expressed by a few of them when I mentioned that there were stable two families in the low income group. One woman ventured to say that that is not what "they" tell us. Whether the mysterious "they" are those who cite the one parent family as an ipso facto measure of family disorganization, or those who see the one parent family as proof of the existence of a matriarchy, or even those who believe its existence is evidence of widespread immorality, I cannot say. But I can say that I think these automatic as-

sumptions and associations miss the crux of the matter and are therefore of questionable significance in program planning and action.

So let us table this talk for the moment and examine in more detail some other aspects of the one-parent family that shown through in our materials. But first, let me say this.

One of the most stricking things I find as I read the literature is that whenever reference is made to the Negro family, the bulk of the author's footnotes go back to E. Franklin Frazier's monumental works of the 1930's on the Negro family, especially the Negro family in the United States. Too frequently and without qualifications, references that purportedly explain life in the 1960's are taken from Frazier's treatment of "The Matriarchate" in the section entitled "In the House of the Mother." However, seldom do I come across footnotes from his chapter on "The Downfall of the Matriarchate" in the same book, in the section called "In the House of the Father." In this chapter Frazier traces the orgin and development of the Negro father's authority in family relations, and authoriey steming from the freedman's ability to purchase his wife and children, the acquisition of property, the economic subordination of women after emancipation, and the Biblical sanction for male ascendancy--all of which reflect good American middle class values.

One must ask why this kind of selectivity? Why do we consistently eliminate the features and processes that suggest similarities with the mainstream of American life and concentrate on ones that suggest differences?

Our experience supports the view that the contemporary female-headed low income Negro family in the city is less a survival of the slave tradition, less a reflection of cultural imperatives than it is a result of the inability of the low income male to support his family. We did not find two kinds of mothers when it came to the question of making out alone. In fact, most of the one-parent families we interviewed

were women who had been married from one to nineteen years before they wound up in their present state. And they still preferred to have things otherwise. Even those who protested vigorously that they did not want to have anything to do with another man would say, in the next breath, that they would like to have "a nice Christian gentlemen who takes care of his family."

To mistake facade and bravado for culturally-defined preference is unforgiveable. In another context, but with relevance here, is a statement Dr. Askerman makes in his discussion of the contemporary American family. Having referred to the fact that the American mother is becoming more agressive and dominating as the father is stripped of authority in the family, he goes on to say:

> ...as we have seen, women's agressiveness and mastery are really a facade. Her facade of self-suficience and strength represents an effort at compensation, an effort to console herself for her inability to depend safely on the man.[4]

I would like to dwell on this point because I think it is crucial to an understanding of some of the families with which we are dealing. I think I can sharpen this understanding of the dilemma of low income wives by sharing with you two real life comments that orchestrate what I am trying to say.

The first is an autobiographical note of Lena Horne. After speaking of the failure of her first marriage, she adds:

> I think Negro wives, no matter what their age or background or even their understanding of the problem , have to be terribly strong-much stronger than their white counterparts. They cannot relax, they cannot simply be loving wives waiting for the man of the house to come home. They have to be spiritual sponges, absorbing the racially inflicted hurts of their men. Yet at the same time they have to give him courage, to make him know that it is worth it to go on, to go back day after day to the humiliations and discouragement of trying to make it in the white man's world for sake of their families. It's hard enough for a poor white man, but a hundred times harder for a Negro.[5]

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[4] Ackerman, Nathan. Psychodynamics of Family Life. New York: Basic Books, 1958. p. 179

[5] "I Just Want to Be Myself." Show, September 1963, p. 63

Elaborating on this theme is James Hicks, editor and columnist for a New York Negro newspaper, in a column about the funeral of Malcom X at which the Negro actor, Ossie Davis, spoke:

> In a nut shell, Ossie said that the defiant, militant stand taken by Malcom X against the determined effort of a certain part of the power structure to emasculate the black man represented the best of the black method.
>
> Ossie then referred to Malcolm as a 'Prince' - A Black Shining Prince who didn't hesitate to die because he loved us so.'
> The women were simply 'carried away.'
> But I don't believe that the vast majority of women who hear Ossie were 'carried away' by the tragedy and the sentiment of the moment.
> On the contary, I strongly feel that their outpouring of sentiment for what Ossie had to say went far deeper than the tragedy of the moment. As I sat there and watched how Negro women were carried away by reference to Malcolm's defiance, I began to feel somewhat uneasy. I began to suspect that Negro women had become just a little tired, just a little hopeless and just a little despairing of the failure of black manhood to fight its way to the top of the heap where it can reign as king of the hill - - if only for one brief moment.[6]

In our materials we get two distinct male images, the "good man" and the "no good" man. I have already indicated that the "good man" works, takes care of his family, helps with the children and is trustworthy and understanding. The "no good" man drinks, doesn't work, mismanages money and chases after women. There is nothing distinctive about this list as they can be found in any recitation of middle class marriage values ills. What is different is that low income mothers do not have to chance to settle for economic security as do so many middle class mothers in their "empty shell" marriages. This is reflected in the comment of a mother who said "if I'm living with him and I've still got to be a mother and father, then I don't need him."

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[6] "Black Manhood." Amsterdam News. March 6, 1965.

In other words, they make choices but these choices are not true preferences. This is why one mother who separated from her husband because she felt he set a bad example for her children said, "It was bad before but now it is neither good nor bad." And another who had given up because of her husband's"fussing and fighting" said, "Now at least we have peace." We found that the economic and social roles of the male and expected of the male as husband and father by wives, mothers and children, are not different from those wished by middle and upper income wives, mothers and children. What is different are the low income Negro males' ability to fulfill these roles, and the family and community consequences of his inabilities to do so.

I think we need to give careful thought to what two sociologists have to say in an article entitled "Who Needs The Negro?"

> The tremendous historical change for the Negro is taking place in these terms: he is not needed. He is not so much oppressed as unwanted; not so much unwanted as unnecessary; not so much abused as ignored. The dominant whites no longer need to exploit him. If he disappeared tomorrow he would hardly be missed. As automation proceeds, it is easier and easier to disregard him.

But this what we do, wittingly or unwittingly, when we try to justify the one parent Negro family of the 1960's as a cultural tradition and when we put more effort in sending mothers back to work that in finding and creating jobs for fathers. On the Child Rearing Study we believed that the key to strenghening family life among low income families lies in the kind of programming and planning that will permit the low income male to really act like a father and a husband.

In this presentation I have attempted to indicate some of the areas in which I think there is need for greater clarity about low income families, namely, the kinds of choices and priorities that are forced upon the poor, the ways they evaluate their child rearing performances, the similarities between their child rearing goals and practices and those of the dominant culture, the meaning of the

one parent family, and the plight of the low income male. I think that Project Enable can contribute much to a deepening of this understanding, and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

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